

Political Reviews

*Micronesia in Review: Issues and Events, 1 July 2010
to 30 June 2011*

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WALLIS AND FUTUNA

Because no reviews of Wallis and Futuna were published in TCP since 2007, this review covers the 2007–2011 period.

On 7 May 2007, a chapter of the modern history of 'Uvea Island (also called Wallis) closed with the death of Lavelua (King) Tomasi Kulimoetoke. The lavelua's passing also affected the social and political landscape of the whole Territory of Wallis and Futuna (Angleviel 2008). Participating in the funeral procession were the two kings of Futuna, his majesty Tuiagaifo from Alo kingdom and his counterpart, Tuisigave, from Sigave kingdom. In his closing address at the very moving ceremony, Tuiagaifo Soane Patita Maituku reminded the crowd of the late king's work and courage in bringing modernity to 'Uvea as well as his efforts to maintain tradition and local customs. Tomasi Kulimoetoke was native to the southern district of Mu'a on his father's side and from the central district of Hahake on his mother's side. He had been appointed king of 'Uvea in 1959 with the support of Pelenato Pulufegu Fuluhea, an influential personality from Mu'a who was also the former lavelua (1947–1950). Lavelua Tomasi Kulimoetoke's reign was mostly one of political and social stability. After his death, the

island remained kingless for fourteen months.

In January 2008, a new health care center, encompassing the existing Sia Hospital and new extensions, was established in Mata Utu, the territorial capital, on 'Uvea. In accordance with the French Ministry of Health's 13 January 2000 mandate, the health center became the Health Agency of the Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands. The agency also encompasses another hospital (Kalevele) on Futuna and three dispensaries, in Mua, Hahake, and Hihifo (IEOM 2010, 90–92). The agency is a national and public establishment with administrative and financial autonomy and a primary mission—to protect people's health. The year 2008 also marked the beginning of work extending and improving the runway at Vele Futuna airport, which was undertaken mainly for security reasons. In the economic arena, the Monitoring Committee of the Ninth European Development Fund (EDF) met in Mata Utu on 3 April to discuss the development contract between the territory and the European Union (EU). Among the difficult issues discussed during the meeting was concern over elementary and high school enrollments, which dropped by 5.8 and 5.1 percent, respectively, in 2010; this trend is expected to continue due to low birth rates and youth emigration and may require education system restructuring and class closures in the future (IEOM 2010, 88). Another thorny problem was the extension of Mata Utu harbor, which was delayed not only due to lack of materials but primarily because no local company was able to handle the job. Finally a

French company was hired to undertake the project.

On 25 July 2008, Kapeliele Faupala, former Kalae Kivalu (prime minister) to Lavelua Kulimoetoke, was enthroned as king of 'Uvea. The Royalist camp had to go through long and hard negotiations before making a choice that not everyone agreed with. There had been riots and calls to depose Lavelua Kulimoetoke after he gave refuge in 2005 to his grandson Tomasi Tuugahala, who had been sentenced to prison for involuntary manslaughter following a car accident (Angleviel 2006, 148). The Renovator (anti-royalist) side wanted every pulekolo (chief) and aliki fa'u (king's minister) appointed during and after that crisis to step down in order to allow time for the two sides to set up a peace process before looking for a new king, but this was not done. Thus, from the outset, neither side unanimously accepted the new king. On 28 July, Philippe Paolantoni was appointed prefect of Wallis and Futuna, succeeding Richard Didier. But while former Prefect Didier seemed to have had cordial relationships with politicians and especially with the Lavelua's Royal Palace in Sagato Soane Place, the new superior administrator did not. Tensions were palpable, and a poisonous atmosphere existed between the French administration and the royal palace.

Also in July, the Territorial Statistical and Economic Studies Service published the first demographic results of the 2008 population census, which showed a population decrease of 10 percent from 2003 to 2008—down from 14,944 to 13,484 inhabitants (Hadj 2009). This alarming fact

reveals the gloomy social and economic climate prevailing in the territory. The decrease resulted from two trends—a reduction in the number of children born per woman and the departure of youth abroad, mainly to France, for training purposes or in search of jobs.

In the political arena, the 21 September 2008 legislative elections saw religious Brother Lopeleto Laufoa'ulu win a second senate term over Socialist Vetelino Nau. Two days later, in an effort to strengthen air service passenger capacity, a second DHC Twin Otter aircraft named *Manulele o Futuna* (Flying Bird of Futuna) entered service alongside the long-serving plane *Ville de Paris* (City of Paris) (IEOM 2009, 83; 2010, 80). In October, the extension work underway at Vele airport on Futuna ran into problems when some landowners threatened to block access to the work site. They denounced the French administration's proposed financial compensation as disrespectful.

After several attempts at peace, the gap between Royalists and Renovators widened, with each group maintaining its own position. On 24 October, the Renovators lost one of their political leaders, Soane Uhila, who had been a founding member of the majority local union, Force Ouvrière, and president of the Territorial Assembly, 1992–1993 and 1999–2000. During a visit to Wallis and Futuna in November 2008, French Secretary of State for Overseas Territories Yves Jégo announced the establishment of a price-monitoring committee charged with annually determining the level and structure of prices in Wallis and Futuna and reporting to the pre-

fect (IEOM 2009, 1440); the setting of a price cap on airfares between Noumea and Wallis; and the creation of a locally adapted military service (*Service Militaire Adapté*). In late 2008, two entrepreneurs were indicted for organized fraud and false use of invoices after an investigation into a tax-evasion scam. The investigation was conducted under the authority of the Court of First Instance of Noumea at Mata Utu and the financial supervision of New Caledonia.

Victor Brial from the *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP, the majority party of the French President Nicolas Sarkozy), who served as deputy of Wallis and Futuna from 2002 to 2007, was elected president of the Territorial Assembly on 4 February 2009. He succeeded Pesamino Taputai, who was affiliated with the center-right party *Union for French Democracy–Democratic Movement* (UDF-MoDem) under François Bayrou. President Brial hosted representatives from the European Council who were supervising several projects supported under the ninth European Development Fund. The European Council representatives also helped local politicians in the preparation of applications for the tenth European Development Fund.

The beginning of 2009 was marked by the first social conflict between workers and executive staff of the Health Agency on 23 February. The workers denounced the administrative methods of the director, who had been in office since 2007, and called for higher wages. In response to the workers' demands, the director left the agency on 23 June.

At the end of March 2009, an accord was signed between a represen-

tative of the commander of the French Armed Forces in the Pacific, based in Noumea, and the two kings of Futuna, pursuant to talks with Secretary of State Jégo. This accord laid the foundations of a future *Groupements du service militaire adapté* (GSMA) center, to be based in Futuna Island. This military center will provide training to young unskilled people in various fields such as building, agriculture, security, and grounds maintenance. Since the signing, the kings and the chiefs of Futuna have been charged with finding land on which to establish the GSMA center. This proposal had been turned down several times by both Lavelua Tomasi Kulimoetoke and his successor, Lavelua Kapeliele Faupala. On a broader scale, in Wallis on 27 March, New Caledonia President Harold Martin, Territorial Assembly President Brial, and Prefect Paolantoni held the first meeting of the committee that monitors the special agreement defining relations between Noumea and Wallis and Futuna. The talks orbited around Wallis and Futuna's self-development, with Caledonian support in various fields (education, agriculture, fishing, sport, and so on). On 9 June the Wallis and Futuna price-monitoring committee was officially implemented (IEOM 2009, 144).

As dawn arrived on 30 September, Wallis and Futuna awoke to find that they had avoided the worst effects of a strong undersea earthquake that occurred near Sāmoa. A tsunami alert had been launched in the region, but the alert system did not work in Wallis and Futuna or in the Fijian archipelago.

On 2 November 2009, a new

branch of the Agence pour le droit à l'initiative économique (ADIE), headquartered in France, officially opened in Mata Utu (IEOM 2009, 145). This agency makes small loans available to unemployed people through a micro-credit system, allowing them to implement projects in various sectors such as trade, building, and handicrafts.

On 25 November, the employees of the Health Agency began an indefinite strike, leading to a blockade of the administrative center of Havelu that was not cleared until 2 December. One week later, on 9 December, in the course of the new 2010 budgetary session, Victor Brial was reelected as head of the Territorial Assembly. In light of the economic priority of increasing the volume of imports to Wallis and Futuna, the politicians decided to extend Leava harbor in Sigave, Futuna.

On 13 March 2010, Tropical Cyclone Tomas devastated the island of Futuna, destroying houses, schools, shops, and infrastructure along the main road as well as in several other places. After Wallisian representatives led an aerial reconnaissance mission, they declared the island a disaster area, although fortunately no people were killed. On 'Uvea, it was mostly the plantations that suffered. On 23 March the parent-teacher association of the Mata Utu Public High School, the only high school in Wallis and Futuna, shut down the school. The parents' representatives decried the severely dilapidated building and the lack of security due in part to a dysfunctional electrical supply network. The high school reopened five weeks later, on 12 April.

The social and economic life on

Wallis Island went from bad to worse. On 14 April, the island experienced a general cut-off of power and water when access to the company in charge of the territory's power and water supplies, Electricité et Eau de Wallis et Futuna (EEWF), was blocked by the company's main labor union. The company has offices in Mata Utu (in the central district of Hahake), as well as in the southern district of Mu'a and in the northern district, Hihifo. The union objected to the dismissal of the company's executive manager and questioned the recruitment of a commercial representative. This company is a subsidiary of Electricité et Eau de Calédonie (EEC), which is itself a subsidiary of the world's second-largest power company, GDF (Gaz de France) Suez. EEWF replaced UNELCO, becoming the main power company on Wallis Island in 1975 and on Futuna in 1987. The company became the water supplier for Wallis Island in 1986. (On Futuna, which has rivers and streams, water is directly routed without treatment from source captures to households.) Ownership of EEWF is split among EEC (67 percent), the Territory of Wallis and Futuna (32 percent) and others (1 percent). In the first half of the twentieth century, the reigning kings gave lands to the French administration so it could establish its main offices. In 1975 the administration gave a piece of land to EEWF so the company could build offices. In 1997 a contract renewing and extending the water and power supply arrangement until 2022 was signed by EEWF, the Territorial Assembly, the lavelua's representative, and the French administration.

The EEWF executive manager was

dismissed by the general manager in New Caledonia, Yves Morault, based on numerous charges of interference in company operations. The dismissal resulted in a demonstration organized by employees protesting Morault's decision. Morault argued that the strikers were stealing the company and blamed the French State for its passivity during this crisis, which progressively became an institutional matter pitting EEWf shareholders (ie, EEC, the Territorial Assembly, and GDF Suez) and the French administration against the lavelua and the Grande Chefferie (the customary government), who have no financial stakes in the company.

A delegation of strikers was granted an audience with Lavelua Kapeliele Faupala and the Royal Council at the Palace Office in Sagato Soane Place. Meanwhile, negotiations continued between the strikers and company representatives who had arrived from New Caledonia. The king ordered the strikers to block access to the company offices, arguing that the land belonged to the king and that he could therefore take it over at any moment. Soon, employees' families and relatives came over and joined in the demonstration. Another issue arose to complicate matters: The Tu'i Mata Utu (the chief of Mata Utu village) intervened on the strikers' behalf, arguing that, since one EEWf office is located in Mata Utu, the company had to provide the villagers with jobs, such as interior and exterior cleaning and maintenance. Also, due to multiple power cuts, the population suffered losses in terms of damaged household appliances. Therefore the local Customers Association asked the

company to reimburse people for these losses. On 14 July, the new prefect, Michel Jeanjean, succeeded Philippe Paolantoni and had to deal with the thorny EEWf issue. Four days later, Lavelua Faupala sent a message to the prefecture announcing his decision to terminate the contract with EEWf and demanding that the company leave Wallis. Moreover, the chieftainship of Wallis Island formed a new water and power company, the Société Wallisienne de l'Eau et de l'Electricité, with the dismissed executive manager as head of the new company. It is important to note that the Wallisian king made these decisions unilaterally, without consulting the Futunan chiefs. On 20 July, when the newborn company began its operations, the whole island experienced power and water cut-offs. Prefect Jeanjean ordered EEWf to resume providing the power and water supplies. Things returned to normal on 23 July. Five days later police reinforcements arrived from Noumea and took possession of the company's offices from the strikers.

The extension work on Mata Utu harbor began on 25 October, supervised by Boyer Enterprises. On 30 November, the digital television service TNT (Télévision Numérique Terrestre) was officially launched with eight new channels instead of the one channel that was previously available. At the opening of the budget session on 7 December, Socialist Siliako Lauhea was elected president of the Territorial Assembly, thanks to a new majority looking for a political alternative to former President Victor Brial of the UMP.

Excitement continued to build in Wallis and Futuna for the central event

of 2011: the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of their status as a French territory. In a broader perspective, French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared 2011 the Year of the French Overseas Territories. Wallis and Futuna also faces another challenge: the organization of the next Pacific Minigames in 2013. Sports representatives are working on planning a program and logistics. In February 2011, the Internet provider Pacific Broadband resumed activity on Wallis, being the sole Internet contract holder with the Department of Posts and Telecommunications. In the cultural and religious arena, the Protestant Pentecostals published a Wallisian version of the Bible, surpassing Catholic translation efforts. With regard to the peace process between Royalists and Renovators, members of the Women's Association of Wallis Island from both sides sat down together. After peace talks, they met with the lavelua in order to show his majesty their determination to move toward peace.

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